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Those in high offices should be above prejudices: President

Kovind commends SC for work during the pandemic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday said persons occupying high constitutional posts should strive to set an example by rising above partisanship and prejudices.

"I have always held that the time for congratulation is not when a man is appointed to an office, but when he retires..." Mr. Kovind said, quoting Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, in his virtual address at the Constitution Day celebrations organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association.

Mr. Kovind commended the Supreme Court for delivering justice even during the COVID-19 pandemic with the help of technology.

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, speaking on the occasion, said the pandemic had generated a "new kind of inequality": the in-

equality between those who have access to technology and those who do not.

The Chief Justice said visits to districts revealed to him that for many who had no access to technology, the courts "simply did not exist".

The top judge said the Supreme Court, which did not stop functioning even for a day during the pandemic, had been making access to virtual courts easier for lawyers and litigants through the installation of kiosks and mobile vans.

Backlog of cases

Chief Justice Bobde, however, said the judiciary and the government had to work in tandem to meet an explosion of filings and the ensuing increase in backlog once the pandemic fades out.

The CJI mooted the idea of "pre-litigation mediation with the force of a decree" as

a solution to pendency. This was after Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal recommended the judiciary, government and lawyers to "pull up their socks" and devise a way out of the existing pendency.

Digital hearing

Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad commended the digital hearing and disposal rate of cases by the judiciary during the past months of the health crisis.

Mr. Prasad said that the Supreme Court had digitally heard and disposed of over 30,000 cases, the High Courts had dealt with 13.74 lakh cases while the District Courts had dealt with 35.93 lakh matters.

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal suggested setting up of four Benches of a Court of Appeal with 15 judges to reduce the workload of the Supreme Court.